

DOE NEWS

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DRAINING OF HANFORD'S K EAST BASIN UNDERWAY

The U.S. Department of Energy and contractor Fluor Hanford have started draining Hanford's K East Basin, located about 400 yards from the Columbia River at the Hanford Site in Washington State.

The large water-filled, concrete basin once held more than 1,100 tons of uranium metal fuel rods, known as spent nuclear fuel, as well as approximately 42 cubic yards (37 cubic meters) of radioactive sludge. Water provided shielding from the highly radioactive materials while they were in the basin. Workers finished removing the spent fuel from the basin in 2004 and radioactive sludge in May 2007.

"We know the K East Basin has leaked contaminated water several times, primarily in the 1970s," said Tom Teynor, DOE Federal Project Director for K Basins Closure. "We want to eliminate the potential for any future leaks and get to the contaminated ground beneath as soon as possible. That's what makes this work so critical to the overall K Basins Closure Project."

In 2004, workers filled the section of the basin that leaked in the past with a cement-like material called grout, at the same time removing 200,000 gallons of water as the grout filled that

portion of the basin. In October, crews placed a foot-thick layer of grout on the entire basin floor to keep residual contamination in place while the basin is drained.

To drain the basin, workers will pump approximately one million gallons of water into 5,000-gallon tanker trucks for transportation to a treatment facility at Hanford. More than 200 trips are expected in the coming month.

Because the water provides shielding from residual contamination in the basin, the work will be done remotely, minimizing the need for workers to enter the basin. As the water is removed, a thin coating of fixative will be applied to the basin walls to glue residual contamination in place.

After the water is out, workers will fill the basin with a sand-like material. Ultimately, the facility will be torn down in order to access soil contaminated by water leaks from the basin in the 1970s and the 1990s.

“For those who have worked in the basin for many years, and for those who know the basin’s history, this is a significant moment,” said Chris Lucas, director of K East Basin Closure, Fluor Hanford. “This facility used to be one of the greatest safety risks at Hanford, and now we’re one step closer to demolishing the basin and getting to the contaminated soil. Removing the contaminated soil and protecting the nearby Columbia River are the ultimate goals of our cleanup work here.”

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